

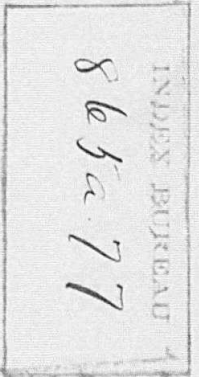
Railways - Eritrea.

NOTE

See 865a.61321 for:

#- from Genoa, May 25, 1911.

Reports re development of-



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

BUREAU OF FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC COMMERCE

WASHINGTON

Index Bureau  
RECEIVED

DEC 2 1926

Dep't. of State

November 29, 1926.

December 8, 1926.

Attention - A-C/C.

Hon. Wilbur J. Carr,  
Assistant Secretary of State,  
Department of State,  
Washington, D. C.

IN REPLY REFER TO 41

Dear Mr. Carr:

The Transportation Division requests that the enclosed railway questionnaire be sent to the American Consul in Aden, Arabia, with instructions that he report, in accordance therewith, on all railways in operation in Eritrea, French Somaliland, and Abyssinia, Africa.

It would be appreciated if this information were furnished as soon as possible.

Very truly yours,

*B*  
Louis Domeratzky,  
Liaison Officer.

Inclosure 81747

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DIT:MM

INDEX BUREAU

8652.77/1



December 8, 1926.

Clarence E. Macy, Esquire,  
American Vice Consul,  
Dakar, Senegal, French West Africa.

Sir:

The Department transmits herewith a copy of a letter from the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, dated November 29, 1926, together with attached questionnaires, which you will accept for your guidance in endeavoring promptly to provide in a report, in quintuplicate, such of the information desired by the Transportation Division in regard to the railways in French West Africa, as may be available.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

For the Secretary of State:

Wilbur J. Carr

Enclosure:

From Bureau of Foreign  
and Domestic Commerce,  
(41) dated November 29,  
1926, with enclosure.

865a.77/1

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Dec 7, 1926

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A true copy of  
the signed orig-

865a.77/1

James L. Park, Esquire,  
American Vice Consul,  
Aden, Arabia.

December 8, 1926

865a.77/1

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865a.77/1

HMC:NEA

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Dec 7, 1926

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In reply to the Department's  
Instruction of December 8,  
1926 (File No. 865a. 771).

Office of Economic Adviser

OCT 6 1927

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

2 copies to Com.

Copy to MIO after ch.C.

OCT 3 1927

RAILWAYS IN ERITREA, FRENCH SOMALILAND and ABYSSINIA.

From Vice Consul:

James Loder Park.

AMERICAN CONSULATE, ADEN, ARABIA.

Date of preparation: September 9, 1927.\*

Date of Mailing: September 14, 1927.

GENERAL

The railways in the three countries under consideration are only two in number with a total trackage of 700 miles. Small, only passably equipped, and not yet profitable in themselves, after twenty years of operation, these systems present two significant features. One is a form of governmental pioneering, with a view ultimately of extension through Abyssinia and the Sudan, although the prospect of such extension is remote. The other is the plan to facilitate

penetration

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\* The great delay in replying to this Questionnaire is much regretted, being due to the apparent reluctance of

the

penetration of the productive centers of Abyssinia and surrounding inland territories, for the exchange of foreign goods. In each case, the Government sponsoring the work did so in the hope that their own nationals would peculiarly profit thereby, and to a very large extent this has been the case. The French, owning the Franco-Ethiopian Railway in French Somaliland, control the commerce passing through this "door of Abyssinia" by means of preferential rates, and the Italians naturally control Eritrean commercial traffic completely.

#### ERITREA.

##### 1, 2, 3, Ownership, Operation, Governmental control.

Eritrea is an Italian colony and the railway built therein between the years 1900 to 1911, was wholly planned and built by the Italian Government for the immediate purposes of encouraging trade to make this rather expensive possession pay, and of rendering practicable the removal of the Colony's seat of Government from the unhealthy port of Masswah to Asmara in the hills, 80 miles inland.

The railway designed in 1900 to extend only to Asmara, has recently been extended to Keren and Agordat, more than doubling the mileage.

The Eritrean Railway is entirely Government operated and controlled.

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the two colonies to give out information officially. Many points of interest and value had to be omitted, unfortunately, and it is impossible to do full justice to a Questionnaire of this complete and technical nature without making a personal visit to the two railways, studying them at close range, under the Questionnaire's guidance.



#### 4. Administrative and Purchasing Officials.

Being a Government monopoly, the only officials with whom dealings can be had regarding purchases, tenders, equipemnt, etcetera is His Excellency the Governor, at present, Signor Gasperini. All communications regarding the railway must be addressed to him. All important business for the railway is subject to his approval only.

a. Tenders are not offered to the general trade. All supplies purchased for the railway are handled through the Colonial Office at Rome, and it is well known that the Italian Government would not welcome the idea of purchases from foreign manufacturers. While policy and appropriations are controlled at Rome, the Governor of Eritrea is essentially the purchasing agent.

#### 5. Financial Statements.

Being Government (and) controlled, balance sheets, profit and loss, income, etcetera are not available. There is no doubt, however, that the railway, although carrying three-fourths of the imports and exports of the Colony, and many passengers (mainly business men) never has paid and does not show a profit now. It is unlikely ever to be commercially (ever) profitable as a business, while in Government hands, owing to the fact that Government needs always come first and Government passengers and goods are naturally franked.

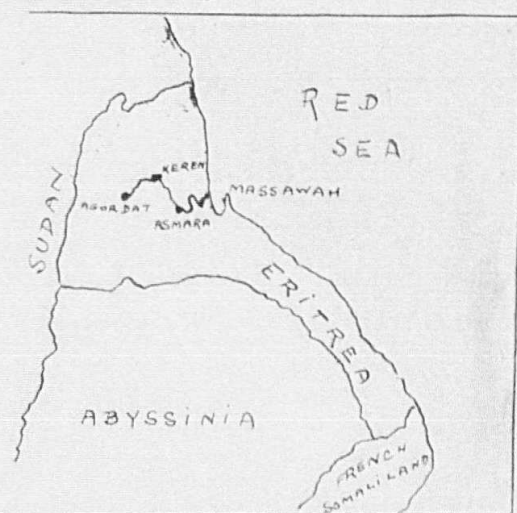
#### 6. Traffic Statistics.

No statements of passengers and freight carried are available.

#### MILEAGE, 7 .

Before

Before the war, there were 80 miles of rails from Massawah, the port to Asmara, the capital, completed in 1911. Two separate extensions have been completed since the war, the first being the Asmara-Keren railway (65.24 miles) and the second the Keren-Agordat (44.73 miles), the total mileage thus far being 199.97 miles. No further extensions are under construction at present. There was a Government proposal to make a very long extension of this Railway through Western Abyssinia into Italian Somalia in the south, but this has been postponed indefinitely. The accom-



panying sketch of the railway gives its relationships with the Red Sea, Abyssinia, French Somaliland and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, and the turn it would take southward to link up the two Italian possessions as proposed last year, tapping the very rich western half of Abyssinia.

Right of way, 8.

The railway necessarily follows a very tortuous course, ascending from sea level to 7,200 feet at Asmara in a distance of 80 miles to Asmara, the highest point. The gauge is 90 centimeters (35.43 inches). Grades are heavy in many places, they are often long, and occur, as might be expected, at frequent intervals. Curve radii are not known, but they are for the most part very small. The road bed is well ballasted with metalling. Ties are of steel, more widely spaced than in America, as the rolling stock is light as possible on account of the grades. The rails are also light, the exact weight and other details being unknown, except that the cross-section is the usual form in the United States, all



all the rails thus far having been imported from the United States. Water is plentiful in Eritrea and tanks occur at frequent intervals (distances not being learned) on account of the high consumption rate.

Fuel is coal, mainly South African. There is no immediate likelihood of electrification, although water power is available and has been utilized in the electrification of Massawah and Asmara. This mountain railway does not lend itself to economical electrification.

Block signalling is used in the four principal stations, the remainder being provided for by hand labor.

Maintenance is very good, and regarded fully adequate for all purposes for which the road was designed.

There are twenty nine tunnels between Massawah and Asmara and nearly as many bridges.

#### 9. Locomotives.

There are locomotives six in number, are American and British, all of similar construction, with 12 wheels, 4 pairs large and two pairs small in front. They are medium-sized.

#### 10. Cars.

The number of cars has not been reported. The passenger cars are the small European compartment type, the freight cars being box, open and flat types, the open being used for cattle.

#### 11. Repair Shops.

No ascertained.

#### 12. History.

The

The origin, organization and control of the Eritrea Government Railway have been referred to. There are no branches. The Massawah terminus was constructed in 1901, the Asmara terminus about 1910, the Keren terminus in 1920, and the Agordat terminus in 1925. There have been no changes in organization or administration from the beginning. It is Government owned and operated, designed primarily for Government uses.

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FRENCH SOMALILAND AND ABYSSINIA.

1, 2, 3, Ownership, Operation, Control.

The one railroad in French Somaliland and Abyssinia, called the Franco-Ethiopian Railway, connects the port of Jibuti and the Abyssinian capital, Addis Ababa. It is owned by a private French Company, supported and subsidized, until recently, at least, by the French Government. Like the Eritrean railroad, this line did not begin to pay until a year or two ago, which was due to increases of both traffic and rates. Operation, as ownership, is private, and is wholly French. There is a very large French personnel, which, assisted by some few Greeks and Armenian clerks, do all of the administrative and office work, natives being employed only as laborers, conductors and brakemen. The terms of Governmental subvention are not known, beyond the fact that the French Government stands ready to make up deficits.

4. Administrative and Purchasing Officials.

The Franco-Ethiopian Railway is controlled by its Board of Directors in Paris, who consider all questions of expenditure. Purchasing, therefore, of rolling stock, repair equipment and road material must receive the Board's approval, although recommendations are made by the Jibuti Director General, whose name is not ascertained but who can always be addressed by title. It would be advisable to acquaint His Excellency the Governor of French Somaliland at Jibuti, with all communications to the Director General.

a. Tenders are offered at times to the French public as all materials are French. They desire no other, preferring

preferring to patronize French industries. After thirty years, (construction was commenced in 1897), the sources of supply are well established, the railway authorities having more or less permanent understandings with chosen manufacturers.

5. Financial Statements.

Not available. It is known that until recently the road was operated for political purposes and at a loss.

6. Traffic Statistics.

Freight and passenger statistics are issued from time to time, but these have not been available up to the present, and freight can only be estimated roughly from the Abyssinian import and export trade estimates, based on merchants opinion, as there are no Abyssinian traffic records or reports. A large number of III class passengers are carried, Classes I and II consisting of a very few officials and foreign messengers, with some few foreign merchants.

7. Mileage.

There is only the main line from Jibuti to Addis Ababa, 487½ miles in length. There are no branches. The building of the road was begun in 1897 completed to Dire Dawa, a section 193 miles long, resumed in 1906 and completed to Addis Ababa in 1916, the remaining distance of 294½ miles. All is complete, as far as it goes, and further construction is not yet proposed. The accom-



panying sketch map illustrates the manner in which the Franco-Ethiopian railway penetrates Abyssinia through French territory and shows the strength of the French commercial position, controlling as it does the "door of,

Abyssinia



"door of Abyssinia". From this it can be realized how, with other European interests and territory on either hand, the French Government would wish to keep the railroad entirely in French hands, under French control and supplied with none but French materials.

#### 8. Right of Way.

The right of way in French Somaliland is of course unconditionally secured, whereas in Abyssinia it was granted by that Government to include a fairly wide zone of leased territory for possible future development of resources. The gauge is 1 meter (39.37 inches). Grades are not heavy at any point, and become really evident in the 147½ mile section between Hawash and Addis Ababa. Curves are all wide and the road is well ballasted. Ties are small, of steel, fairly closely spaced and of French manufacture. Rails are light, short and of the usual I-shape in cross-section.

Water is absent in the country between Jib ti and Dire Dawa, which is complete desert, and is carried to steel tanks placed at convenient intervals. South African coal is used for fuel. There are no plans for electrification. Block signals are used in the 4 important stations, - Jibuti, Dire Dawa, Hawash and Addis Ababa, but are rarely in working order, simple flagging being generally resorted to. As it is a single-track railway, all traffic is handled by telephone, when the natives do not steal the wire to make copper trinkets and utensils. Maintenance is good, although floods, wash-outs and marauders keep the repair crews constantly busy. There is one long steel bridge, about ½ mile, and three or four smaller ones, only in the mountainous parts.

#### 9. Locomotives

9. Locomotives.

These are ten in number, to supply two regular trains weekly each way, provide double pulling power for certain grades and supply extra freight and special passenger trains at frequent intervals. The locomotives are of medium size..

10. Cars.

Passenger cars are the small, European, compartment type, freight cars being mainly the open kind. They are equipped with automatic interlocking couplers, with air-brakes and spring buffers.

11. Repair Shops.

Three, at Jibuti, Dire Dawa and Addis Ababa, the size and importance being in the order given. They are not equipped to do large castings and usually avoid foundry work when possible. They are equipped with little more than forges and lathes. Purchases are all made by decision of the Paris Board, on the recommendation of the Jibuti Director General, acting in conjunction, in important matters involving general policy, with the Governor of the Colony.

12. History.

A review of the roads history has been given. It might be added that there has been no change in organization, ownership <sup>or</sup> ~~&~~ control. The long delay in completing the road (1897-1916) was due to financial rather than political or engineering difficulties. The route is not especially formidable from an engineering point of view, only the flat desert stretch from Jibuti to the base of the Dire Dawa highlands

having



having been trying, on account of lack of water and fearful heat. The principal altitudes are: Sea level at Jibuti, 6,000 feet at Dire Dawa, 4,000 feet at Hawash, and 8,000 feet at Addis Ababa.

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Central File: Decimal File 865A.77, Internal Affairs Of States, Eritrea, Railway. Concessions. Construction. Equipment., November 29, 1926. 29 Nov. 1926. MS European Colonialism in the Early 20th Century. National Archives (United States). Archives Unbound, link. [gale.com%2Fapps%2Fdoc%2FSC5109729367%2FGDSC%3Fu%3Domni%26sid%3Dbookmark-GDSC](https://www.gale.com%2Fapps%2Fdoc%2FSC5109729367%2FGDSC%3Fu%3Domni%26sid%3Dbookmark-GDSC). Accessed 18 June 2025.